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HEALTH

Critical challenge of Alzheimer's requires a long-range plan

By MICHAEL CIAMARRA

It is rare, indeed, when legislative action is paired with "long-term strategy," but it happened in this year's session when the Legislature passed Rep. Laura Hall's bill to create an Alzheimer's Disease Task Force.

During the so-called "health care" debate last year, I questioned how Alabama's Medicaid Agency and other state services will deal with the costs of Alzheimer's disease from now to 2050. As Neil Buckholtz, chief of dementias of aging at the National Institute on Aging, said, "This public health emergency is just going to get out of control if we don't do something about it."

According to the Alzheimer's Association's recent 2010 Facts and Figures report, at least 91,000 Alabama residents are afflicted with Alzheimer's. If these trends continue, 31 percent of the state's population over age 65 will have the disease by the year 2025.

At the national level in 2008, the economic value of the care provided by family and other unpaid caregivers of people with Alzheimer's and other dementias was roughly 9.9 million people at a cost of \$94 billion. The 2010 Facts and Figures reports that there are nearly 188,000 Alzheimer's/dementia caregivers in Alabama, which translates to an estimated 214 million hours of unpaid care per year.

We are at one of those rare moments in history where real change is possible. A consensus of three Nobel Prize-winning scientists and more than 125 other neuroscientists has proclaimed that it is possible to end Alzheimer's by 2020.

In the meantime, the Alabama Alzheimer's Disease Task Force will review existing long-term care industries, resources, respite care, state support of Alzheimer's disease research, state university-educated

SOME STATISTICS ON ALZHEIMER'S

- ▶ Today there is no cure, no disease-modifying treatment, and no prevention.
- ▶ The CDC lists Alzheimer's disease as the sixth leading cause of death.
- ▶ 5.3 million Americans currently suffer from Alzheimer's — 1 in 8 Americans over 65 and almost 1 in 2 over 85.
- ▶ By 2050, someone will develop Alzheimer's every 33 seconds.
- ▶ Medicare is projected to spend \$189 billion on beneficiaries with Alzheimer's and other dementias by 2015.
- ▶ Given the present trends, Alzheimer's will cost Medicare and Medicaid a projected \$19.89 trillion between 2010 and 2050.
- ▶ A five-year delay of onset would save \$8.51 trillion over that same period.

critical health care professionals, long-range state policies and responses, and coordination of efforts between public and private sectors.

The task force will hold public hearings, discussions and webcasts and plans to produce a report next year. (Task force recommendations or proposals will not be considered a medical protocol or standard of care for the treatment of this disease.)

We know that it is just a beginning, and new strategies and technologies will build on these initial proposals. It is refreshing that state lawmakers are beginning to think long term rather than just toward the next election.

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DEMOCRATS: Midterm outlook not a good one

From Page 1F

stubbornly high at 9.5 percent. Far from delivering a bounce in the polls, the overhaul of health reform that Obama pushed through in March has incensed many voters. Oil still fouls the Gulf of Mexico.

The country is in the sort of unhappy and scratchy mood that voters in midterms habitually take out on the president's party.

The outlook for the Democrats is certainly worse than you would think if you looked only at the "generic" polls that ask which party voters are likelier to vote for. Right now, they are more or less level-pegging. That is a big drop for the Democrats since Obama was elected, but not necessarily fatal on its own. The real trouble is that an enormous "enthusiasm gap" now separates the two parties.

In the general election of 2008, part of the Democrats' appeal was their fresh and inspiring presidential candidate. But Obama is not up for re-election until November 2012, so even the diminishing number of voters who continue to find him inspiring might not vote in the midterms, when turnout is usually a good 15 points or so lower. That is especially true of the first-time voters, enthusiastic young people and fired-up blacks Obama was able to mobilize in 2008. All polls now find that a far bigger proportion of Republicans than Democrats or independents are "more enthusiastic" about voting in the midterms.

A survey published by the Pew Research Center found that 56 percent of Republican voters were more enthusiastic about voting this year, the highest proportion since the Republican triumph of 1994.

It gets worse. Our list of the battleground districts shows the 70 districts that will be in closest contention in November and where control of the House will be won or lost. The headline finding is that opinion in the battleground districts is even less encouraging to the Democrats than it is in the country as a whole.

In battleground districts, 64 percent of voters think the country is going in the wrong direc-

tion against 27 percent who think it is on the right track (for the nation as a whole, the percentages are 59 percent and 34 percent, respectively); nearly half of the voters in the vulnerable Democratic districts identify themselves as conservatives rather than liberals or moderates; and only 40 percent of voters in these districts approve of Obama's job performance.

Needless to say, opinions of Obama vary a good deal by color, class and region. Blacks still support him strongly. But Henry Olsen of the American Enterprise Institute points out that many battleground districts are in less-urban areas full of white, blue-collar voters with fewer years of education than the average. The loyalty of this particular breed of traditional Democrat is less assured.

For all these woes, the Democrats could yet hang on. Olsen makes the point that it is rare for a president's party actually to lose Congress in his first term: Before the upset of 1994, the only previous such turnaround was when the Republicans lost in 1954 under Eisenhower. The Democrats enjoy stronger local organization in many districts and, despite having fewer friends on Wall Street these days, are expected to have more money to spend: They have not given up hope of persuading the new voters who helped to elect Obama in 2008 to turn out again; the campaign organization he built for that election has been kept running, under the new name Organizing for America.

One hope on the Democratic side is that the conservative "tea party" movement will drive the Republicans too far to the right for the taste of mainstream voters. But there is not much evidence of that in the polling. Indeed, the number of voters telling Gallup's pollsters that the Republicans are too conservative has fallen since 2008 from 43 percent to 40 percent, and the proportion who think them about right has grown from 38 percent to 41 percent. Meanwhile, the share of voters who consider the Democrats "too liberal" has risen from 39 percent to 49 percent.

That cannot be good news for Pelosi and her anxious colleagues in the House.

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SMOKING: U.S. needs stamp of disapproval

From Page 1F

American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association, urged President John F. Kennedy to establish a commission to study the mounting evidence of the adverse health effects of smoking.

Terry was charged with producing an expert scientific review of the subject. (Among the 10 eminent biomedical scientists asked to form the committee to write the report was Dr. Mickey LeMaistre, a distinguished alumnus of the University of Alabama.) Meeting in secret for 14 months from November 1962 at the National Library of Medicine (named after U.S. Sen. Lister Hill of Alabama), the committee reviewed more than 7,000 scientific articles on smoking, as well as information provided by the tobacco industry.

The 387-page report, issued on Jan. 11, 1964, at a packed press conference, hit the country like a bombshell, making front-page headlines in virtually every newspaper in the country. Writing in the New York State Journal of Medicine in 1983, Terry recalled, "The report not only carried a strong condemnation of tobacco usage, especially cigarette smoking, but conveyed its message in such clear and concise language that it could not be misunderstood."

There was no minority report. Terry was exceptionally proud of the fact that of the "more than 30,000 articles published in the 20 years since the report, almost without exception they confirm



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the committee's findings and extend the knowledge of the health hazards of smoking."

Terry spent the rest of his life as a spokesperson for the anti-smoking movement and fought hard to eliminate smoking from the workplace.

It is fitting to recall Terry's appeal to physicians in 1983 not to be complacent about fighting cigarette smoking — or the tobacco industry: "The abuses of the cigarette companies are too numerous to mention. It is clear that they do not want the public to recognize the health hazards and the enormous financial cost to society caused by smoking. Therefore, health professionals must take back the leadership role."

"I hope that every member of the medical profession will recognize this responsibility and will be committed to spreading the message that tobacco smoking is the single most preventable cause of disability and death in the United States."

Nearly half a century after the

surgeon general's report, cigarettes still kill more Americans than AIDS, breast cancer, sickle cell disease, motor vehicle accidents, alcohol, illegal drugs, homicides, suicides and fires combined. A stamp commemorating Terry's monumental report will be an important symbol to remind us all to help protect the next generation from the needless suffering caused by cigarette smoking.

Alan Blum, M.D., directs the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. An exhibition of the center's collection of the world's anti-smoking postage stamps will be on view at the Alabama Museum of the Health Sciences from Monday through Sept. 15. To support a stamp commemorating Dr. Luther Terry's release of the Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, write to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee c/o Stamp Development, U.S. Postal Service, 1735 N. Lynn St., Suite 5013, Arlington, VA 22209-6432.

RACE: Contrast on some issues is stark

From Page 1F

culture." To hear whites tell it, what really bothers them is a growing federal government that they fear will intervene in their lives — unless there's an oil spill along the Gulf Coast, of course, in which case their complaint is too little intervention. Budget deficits are a worry, too, unless it's George Bush running up the red ink.

But, as Buchanan and Beck have noted, there is no escaping the role of race in the animosity toward Obama.

Whites, for instance, are overwhelmingly in favor of Arizona's immigration law, according to most polls. And virtually none of the surveys has shown any concern for the rights of nonwhite Hispanics who would be subject to racial profiling and illegal search and seizures. These are the same people who like to wave copies of the U.S. Constitution and claim Obama is curtailing their freedoms.

The differences between whites and nonwhites on (the Arizona immigration law) are very stark," Matthew Kerbel, a political scientist at Villanova University, told the Christian Science Monitor. "The numbers seem to reflect that among white American voters, there is something that needs to be done about illegal immigration and that the Arizona law addresses that. But among blacks and Hispanics, the law is viewed as a strong form of racial profiling, and so there is strong sentiment against it."

Amazing, really, how people from German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French, Welsh, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian and Russian backgrounds can land on American shores and coalesce around a racial category concocted solely to exploit others.

Enter the pitiful "tea-party" movement, made up largely of well-educated and well-heeled whites. How desperately they cling to privileges that accrue from their skin color, going so far as to proclaim themselves victims of reverse discrimination.

According to a New York Times/CBS poll in April, tea party supporters are having a



Despite resistance from those who have a death grip on white privilege, we are becoming a nation of people having origins not in geography but in humanity.

conception fit because Obama is supposedly helping the poor people rather than the middle class or the rich.

"The overwhelming majority of supporters say Mr. Obama does not share the values most Americans live by and that he does not understand the problems of people like themselves." The Times report on the poll said. "More than half say the policies of the administration favor the poor, and 25 percent think that the administration favors blacks over whites."

Tell that to black people who live in places such as Southeast Washington, where the unemployment rate exceeds 30 percent.

As for those who would claim that blacks relish their racial designation as much as whites do, theirs, just remember that if white people didn't insist on being white, there would be no such thing as race.

Eventually, though, demographic changes will render such designations all but meaningless. Despite resistance from those who have a death grip on white privilege, we are becoming a nation of people having origins not in geography but in humanity. Someday soon, let's hope, each of us will be a minority of one, and when we go to the polls we'll vote as Americans.

Courtland Milloy is a columnist for The Washington Post.

CONTACT YOUR CONGRESSMAN

The members of Alabama's congressional delegation can be contacted easily through their official websites:

- ▶ Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Alabama: shelby.senate.gov/public
- ▶ Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Alabama:

sessions.senate.gov/public

- ▶ Rep. Jo Bonner, 1st District, R-Mobile: bonner.house.gov
- ▶ Rep. Bobby Bright, 2nd District, D-Montgomery: www.bright.house.gov
- ▶ Rep. Mike Rogers, 3rd

District, R-Anniston: www.house.gov/mike-rogers

- ▶ Rep. Robert Aderholt, 4th District, R-Haleyville: aderholt.house.gov
- ▶ Rep. Parker Griffith, 5th District, R-Huntsville: griffith.house.gov

▶ Rep. Spencer Bachus, 6th District, R-Vestavia Hills: bachus.house.gov

▶ Rep. Artur Davis, 7th District, D-Birmingham: arturdavis.house.gov

Source: U.S. Congress official websites